

PROSTHODONTIC RESIDENCY

Notes from the Prosthodontic Residency Series - Updated April 2024

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Residency Series, co-sponsored by the Office of Career and Professional Development and the UCSF ADEA chapter. Residents shared their thoughts about prosthodontic dentistry on a panel and gave advice to dental students about the application process and residency experience.

Q: What is a typical day in the life of a prosthodontics resident?

A: The UCSF prosthodontics residency program progresses from exams and diagnosing and treatment planning in the first year, to finishing complex restorative work in the third year, such as cases that span 6+ months and involve collaboration with other dental specialists. At UCSF and the VA, residents do clinicals and see patients Mon-Thurs (4 days out of the week) and have didactic classes on Fridays. In addition, there are didactics, seminars, and discussions Monday through Thursdays before clinic, during lunch, or after-hours to supplement clinicals. Residents will do lab work after-hours, or they review literature and prepare presentations. 1st year residents spend the first few months performing new patient exams and practicing diagnosing and treatment planning cases. More importantly, residents discuss finances with their patients and learn to present expensive treatment options to their patients. 1st year residents are mostly in didactic learning, which lessens with subsequent years as residents spend more time with patients. 2nd year residents begin working on the cases they previously planned. They may also do easier procedures that were referred by other specialties. 3rd year residents are seeing more patients and are trying to finish up their long-term cases before graduation. They may also see patients assigned by faculty that they haven't yet had experience with.

Q: Describe UCSF's prosthodontics residency.

A: Each year, UCSF receives about 80 applications, offers interviews to about 20, and admits 3 residents. Everyone is assigned to a "pod" consisting of a 1st/2nd/3rd year, similar to "vertical links" in UCSF's pre-doc clinic, and patients are transferred within pods to maintain continuity of care. UCSF boasts a smaller program size, which facilitates a closer relationship with co-residents and faculty. Faculty assign patients to residents to ensure that everyone gets a similar experience. Residents praise UCSF for giving them the autonomy to build their own treatment plans, since some programs feed their students a treatment plan. While they receive guidance and support from faculty, residents are challenged to think through their cases and devise treatment based on their assessment and experience. The UCSF program affords a lot of independence to their residents, such as allowing them to choose the patients they want to treat or how closely they want to work with other specialties. The program also hosts various seminars and meetings to encourage collaboration with colleagues in prosth, as well as other specialties. For example, there are the periodontics-prosthodontics and endodontics-prosthodontics seminars to learn more about the viewpoints of other specialties. Also, there is a monthly meeting of 4 prosthodontics residents in which they discuss a treatment plan and gain insight from other providers. The goal of these monthly meetings is to expose individuals to different philosophies and approaches to care.

Q: Describe the VA prosthodontics residency.

A: Unlike the UCSF residents, VA residents must treat every patient that walks through the door. VA residents don't have to worry about the cost of their treatment plans because all treatment is paid for by the government. A unique aspect of the VA residency is that, while the training and procedures are done at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, the didactic portion of their education is done at UCSF. For example, VA residents can still discuss treatment planning with their peers at UCSF. Each year, 1 resident is accepted into the VA program and paid a salary.

Q: When should students apply for a prosthodontics residency?

A: For students who don't want to take a gap year, they should compile documents (e.g., letters of recommendation) and visit programs as early as possible so that they can submit their application in the summer (May/June) following their 3rd year of dental school, when the cycle opens. Applicants receive interview invites in Aug/Sep and typically interview in Sep/Oct. They rank their programs (prosth is part of phase I MATCH, so the deadline is in the 1st week of Nov) and get acceptances usually around Thanksgiving. The Post-Match Cycle is between schools with vacant seats and people that didn't match.

Q: What constitutes a competitive application for prosthodontics residency?

A: Different programs have different requirements, so residents recommend that applicants look at the programs in which they are interested. Some key things are strong letters of recommendation, especially from well-connected faculty. Personal statements are reviewed more carefully for applicants offered an interview. Applicants should show strong interest in prosthodontics and engage in prosth-related activities.

Q: Describe prosthodontics residency interviews.

A: Residency interviews vary by program. Some program interviews set up things for their interviewees, such as by asking them to prep teeth or do a wax-up to test hand skills. Others have multiple mini-interviews (MMIs) or present a case for interviewees to discuss. At UCSF, about 4 people are invited to an interview date, and the day is focused on familiarizing themselves with the clinic and the program, and meeting the program directors, faculty, and potential co-residents.

Q: What opportunities are there after graduating from prosthodontics residency?

A: Prosthodontics can start a private practice where they see only a few patients per day for complex, large restorative cases. Alternatively, some residents graduate from their prosthodontics residency program and practice as a general practitioner, since they are more astute at identifying favorable cases to treat. Others enter academia and teach with the knowledge of the specialty, since prosthodontists have a solid understanding of everything and can plan treatment and foresee problems very well.

Q: How can prospective applicants learn more about prosthodontics?

A: Students who are interested are welcome to shadow in the prosthodontics clinic. They can also get involved in prosth-related RCOs and attend events, such as conferences.